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AUTHOR Moore, Shirley G.
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ABSTRACT

This presentation describes young children's social development, beginning with infancy and spanning the early childhood years. Topics include: (1) attachment when the infant is very young; (2) a social-learning theory view of the early months of life; (3) the onset of prosocial behavior and responsibility; and (4) competence in the early childhood peer group. An hypothesis is proposed to explain why attachment theory predicts early competence better than research from a social learning orientation, and the hope is expressed that attachment theorists and social learning theorists can pool their insights regarding development. The discussion of prosocial behavior and responsibility focuses on a cluster of child behaviors that are central to socialization and that require the caregiver to take the best from attachment theory and social learning theory: non-egocentric behaviors such as empathy, sympathy, consideration for others, fairness, and social responsibility. Particular attention is given to the work of Baldwin (1948), Hoffman (1963), and Baumrind (1971) concerning, respectively, discipline styles, parent influence on children's consideration for others, and parent-child interaction styles and social responsibility in young children. Early childhood settings appear to be effective training grounds for young children's social competence; in particular, social perspective-taking and consideration for others. (RH)

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Social Development of the Young Child: Two Theories, Two Stories

Shirley G. Moore
University of Minnesota

This presentation describes specifically social development in the early years, beginning in infancy and spanning early childhood. The areas to be discussed will be the child-caregiver attachment during the first 12--18 months of life and the development of prosocial behavior and social responsibility during the period from two to seven or eight years of age.

The field of developmental psychology is in the middle of an exciting period of growth during which more and more of the contemporary research emanating from the field is on topics of quite direct relevance to practice. Consider the fact that the field is barely 60 years old. Although there existed isolated pockets of research on aspects of child development prior to 1924, the field actually can be dated from the time that the Rockefeller family funded six child development centers -- one in Canada at the University of Toronto, and five in the United States at the universities of Iowa, California, and Minnesota, and at Columbia University and Yale University. The funding of these centers between 1924 and 1928, by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Foundation, virtually created a field of research and an academic discipline. Research scholars who wanted to study children were invited to join the faculties of the Centers, and eager students wishing to get in on the ground floor of a new field of research flocked to them.

To give you an idea of the growth of the field in that 60-year period, in 1983 the 4th edition of the Handbook of Child Psychology was published by Wiley & Company (Mussen, 1983). (Some of you may remember the previous handbooks as the "Carmichael manuals."). The 1983 edition of the handbooks is an encyclopedic-like treatment of what is known about child psychology that fills four volumes with over 3000 pages of text and references, and 1010 pages of entries in the author index -- a remarkable record of productivity. If even a small portion of that work has led up to important insights about child behavior and development, the effort truly is outstanding.

Several weeks ago, a few thousand people attended the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development in Baltimore, Maryland. There are approximately 1800 program entries for the conference including invited addresses, research reports, and symposia. I sampled those entries with some care and I would judge, from the titles of papers, that well over three-fourths of the topics discussed are of direct relevance to practice and, hence, would be informative and thought provoking to child and family educators, health services practitioners, and others. Today, I doubt that we could get good agreement on a distinction between what is basic and what is applied research among SCRD members themselves since so much of what is considered basic developmental research has important implications for both practice and theory. The establishment of the Lipman Research Institute is timely, to be sure; over the next decade or more, the Institute can play a very significant role in bringing research information to the practitioner.

I will be talking specifically about social development in the early years, beginning in infancy and spanning early childhood. Although I will be describing research on the mother-child relationship, the principles and issues addressed by this research have quite direct implications for secondary caregivers and teachers as well.

I want to present work in two general areas of research -- the first is child-caregiver attachment during the first 12 to 18 months of life, and the second is the development of prosocial behavior and social responsibility during the period from about two to seven or eight years of age. I will comment on some continuities and discontinuities in caregiving from infancy to early childhood and discuss the role of two major social developmental theories, attachment theory and social learning theory, as they apply to these areas of development.

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Attachment in the Early Months of Life

Let's consider attachment. I suspect that many of you are familiar with the attachment phenomenon as it was proposed by John Bowlby (1969). I will briefly describe the construct and the research methods used in the study of attachment, and then I want to tell you about some of the more recent revelations about early development gleaned from attachment research. If you will recall, John Bowlby proposed a biological evolutionary theory of mother-child attachment that paralleled that which assured the survival of the young in other animal species. He hypothesized that the newborn human child is primed genetically to become attached, having come into the world predisposed to seek and savor close body proximity to a caregiver. The infant comes equipped with a repertoire of proximity-related behaviors such as sucking, clinging, and grasping, and with a particular affinity for the human face and voice. The attachment process was likened to the process of "imprinting" in some animals, although Bowlby did not believe that the child's attachment depended on those few moments directly after birth as it does in many other species. In fact, Bowlby thought of attachment as a gradual developmental process that occurs over the first year of life, blossoming close to the end of that year, intensifying up to about 189 months, and then gradually becoming less intense as the child enters the preschool years. A clear indicator of attachment to the caregiver is the typical intense mother-preference shown by children around eight months or so, and the period of "stranger wariness."

Mary Ainsworth, a student of Bowlby's, was instrumental in moving the attachment construct into the empirical arena (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1971; Ainsworth, Biehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Initially, Ainsworth spent many months making careful natural observation of mothers and their infants during the early months of life. She and her colleagues then developed an assessment task, called the Ainsworth Strange Situation, to measure the quality of the child's attachment to the primary caregiver (typically the mother) and an observation/rating scale of mothering behaviors to assess the quality of the mother's interactions with her infant.

Let's consider the assessment of attachment. Briefly, the Ainsworth Strange Situation is a 20-minute laboratory session in which a mother and baby (between about 12 and 18 months of age) are brought into a small, simply furnished room with a cluster of age-appropriate toys on the floor. Mom is instructed to get the baby interested in playing with the toys and then to sit down in a chair nearby as her baby explores and plays. In the course of the 20 minutes in the session a series of events takes place. The baby plays a short time, then a stranger enters and attempts to get acquainted with the baby, offering a friendly greeting. After a few minutes the mother gets up and leaves with nary a comment to the baby. Most babies are upset by this -- some more than others -- and the stranger tries to comfort the baby. The mother then returns and she comforts the baby, attempting to get the baby back to playing and exploring. The stranger leaves at this point, and then mother also leaves -- for the second time. At this point, virtually all babies are quite upset. After a short period, mom returns and again tries to comfort the baby and get him or her back to playing with the toys.

On the basis of this brief diagnostic procedure, children are classified as either securely attached or insecurely attached, and insecurely attached children are classified as either avoidant or resistant in their attachment. (I will not comment further on this particular distinction among insecurely attached infants.)

What are the behavioral indicators of secure vs. insecure attachment in the strange situation? First, observers note the quality of the child's exploration and play in the presence of mom. Secure babies play contentedly in her presence, perhaps checking with her from time to time by showing her a toy or babbling to her. Interestingly, the degree of upset when mom leaves is not a particularly significant factor in assessing the quality of attachment; virtually all babies are upset -- especially at mom's second departure. What is noted is the nature of the reunion of the mother and child. Secure babies make clear positive overtures to mom upon reunion. If the baby was only mildly upset, mom is greeted with smiles, delightful squeals and babblings. Highly upset babies with secure attachments approach mom for more direct physical comfort allowing themselves to be cuddled, soothed and reassured. Babies rated insecure show ambivalence or avoidance toward mom during reunion. They may fail to seek comfort and reassurance -- or seek it, but reject it when it is offered.

The predictive validity of this 20-minute laboratory procedure is remarkable. A surprising number of children are stable in their attachment status from assessment at 12 months to 18 or 24 months (Sroufe &

Waters, 1977). Attachment status also predicts social competence determined independent of the Ainsworth situation. In home and laboratory observation, securely attached children have been judged to be more self sufficient, cooperative, and compliant (Londerville & Main 1981; Staytor, Hogan & Ainsworth, 1971) and are more likely to approach tasks with positive affect than insecurely attached children (Matas, Arend, & Sroufe, 1978). Finally, secure attachment ratings made at 12 or 18 months of age predicted competence in peer interactions, and in task orientation, at ages three and four (Waters, Wippman, & Sroufe, 1979). That is very good prediction, indeed! It suggests that the quality of infant attachment, as measured by the Ainsworth Strange Situation, has significant consequences for the child's social, emotional and cognitive development during the important toddler and preschool years.

Let's get back to mom, who must be responsible for much of this early development. I mentioned that Mary Ainsworth had developed an optimal mother rating scale. The instrument identifies four mother-caregiving dimensions: sensitive/insensitive, accepting/rejecting, cooperating/intrusive and accessible/ignoring. The optimal Ainsworth mother is one who accommodates her behavior to her infant's wants and needs. She "reads" her infant's cues well, interprets the baby's messages accurately, attends signals of distress, helps to sustain her baby's exploration and play, responds to the baby's social overtures, and elicits social behavior from the baby without being pushy or overbearing. Berry Brazelton speaks of the mother and child doing a "dance" together -- the mother excites the infant up to a point short of behavioral disintegration, then backs off to let the child get its act together before resuming interaction. Babies reciprocate by responding socially and emotionally to mom's overtures and by using mother as a secure base of support for both object and social exploration and play.

It is easy to take this research for granted; it sounds so reasonable. We <u>should</u> be able to predict competence in the preschool years from the quality of mother-child interaction during the first 18 months of life. But, in fact, we have not been able to do that very well in the past. In the 1940's and 1950's, social learning theorists studied some of the critical developmental tasks faced by the young child such as weaning and toilet-training. They observed how caregivers managed excessive crying and dependency, autonomy striving and primitive aggressive outbursts (Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957: Sears, Whiting, Nowlis, & Sear. 1953). As important as these child rearing functions are, they were not so effective in predicting child competences as is the contemporary measure of optimal mothering developed by Ainsworth.

I would like to propose an hypothesis as to why the Bowlby/Ainsworth theory, with its secure attachment and optimal mother constructs, predicts early competence better than did research from a social learning orientation. What the attachment theorists emphasize about the mother-child relationship in the first year of life is the mother's role in accommodating her <u>baby's</u> agenda -- not <u>her</u> agenda for the baby, but the baby's agenda. What does that baby tell mom it wants, and how effectively does mom "enable" the baby to get what it wants? The social learning theorists, on the other hand, emphasized the role of the <u>mother's</u> agenda for the baby. How does mom produce changes in the infant's behavior when she judges a behavior to be changeworthy? How does she help the baby to establish a reasonable sleep schedule? How does she manage excessive crying and fussing, the willful violation of "no nos," struggles to surmount barriers that parents put in place for safety reasons, and temper outbursts? Clearly, mothers and other caregivers must cope with these and other challenging problems over and over during the first 18 months of a child's life. Ainsworth does not enlighten us on this aspect of parenting. Consider the four characteristics of the optimal mother: she is sensitive, accepting, cooperates with her child, and is accessible. There is little recognition of the need for the mother to modify her infant's behavioral repertoire, nor is the mother's skill inspiring her baby to "do the cooperating" in the interest of family harmony assessed by this instrument. Yet, it is the attachment literature that does the better job of predicting child competence (including compliance and cooperativeness with caregivers) in infancy and early childhood.

The most obvious explanation for this state of affairs is that attachment theory has identified the most crucial aspect of the mother-child relationship during the first year of life -- the establishment of a strong affective bond between caregiver and child. The attachment that results would appear to have less to do with how the mother manages changeworthy behavior than how effectively she enables her child to be satisfied, contented, and busy at play and exploration. There is little doubt that mothers vary in how skillfully they handle the changeworthy behavior of their children, but the crucial parenting task in the first year of life may be the successful establishment of a secure attachment; all else is secondary.

It would be interesting to know how mothers of secure infants manage behavior problems when confronted with them. One would suspect that the mother who is successful in helping her young infant to feel happy, satisfied and secure also may be an effective, sensitive agent of behavior change. But that remains to be seen. As researchers continue to study competence as a function of attachment status--and particularly as they follow children into toddlerhood and early childhood -- more will be learned regarding the mother's dual role of accommodating her child's agenda while pursing her own parenting agenda as an agent of socialization.

A Social-Learning Theory View of the Early Months of Life

Let us consider now what social learning theory has to say about mom's role as a change agent in child rearing. Learning theorists proposed a similar phenomenon to attachment occurring during the child's first year of life called "emotional dependence" (Sears et al., 1957). As with attachment, emotional dependence is defined as an intense need on the part of the child for a nurturant, attentive relationship with the primary caregiver, preference for that caregiver over all others, and wariness of strangers. Social learning theorists proposed a different mechanism than Bowlby's proximity-seeking (although not an incompatible one) to account for the development of emotional dependence. Learning theorists endowed the child with a highly sensitive nervous system capable or registering pain, and capable or conditioning--that is, of learning to make connections between events and their outcomes. Conditioning is evident when the child obviously has made the connection between the pain of hunger and the mother's appearance and nurturant attention coincident with the reduction of pain. The learning paradigm is near perfect. Hunger occurs five or six times a day in a young infant. Being fed is virtually always preceded by discomfort that subsides magically when mom comes and offers the breast or bottle; hence, mom become endowed with powerful reinforcing properties. Particularly the gentle physical touching, smiles and pleasant social interactions that accompany feeding and other caregiving events become sources of reward for the child--apart from the caregiving context. It is primarily through this conditioning process that the child gradually acquires an emotional dependence on the primary caregiver; the very presence of the caregiver becomes a source of great comfort to the child.

In social learning theory, warmth and nurturance in the mother-child relationship is crucial just as it is in attachment theory. The child seeks ways to elicit and maintain the adult's nurturant attention even in the absence of a need for physical care. However, the social learning theorists carried the analysis a bit further. They pointed out one of the ironies of early socialization; the child no sooner becomes dependent on significant adults for love and affection when the adults begin to make their nurturance contingent on the child's giving up some autonomy and self gratification. Mom says, in effect, if you bite me, scream angrily at me, cry and fuss when I think you are not in pain, touch things are are "no nos," I will frown at you and refuse to give you hugs and kisses. Social hearing theorists referred to this kind of disciplinary technique as "withdrawal of love" specifically because the nurturant mother-child relationship is used to motivate compliance in the child. The child wants and needs mom's nurturance enough to tolerate some constraints on behavior in order to get that nurturance and avoid disapproval. Even the most accepting parent interrupts the follow of nurturance at times to express displeasure at her child's behavior: this should not because for guilt. We need to talk to young mothers about this aspect of "life with baby" so that they will be prepared for it. We should not ignore, as the attachment theorists does, the fact that such parenting events are bound to occur and serve a legitimate purpose. We need to elaborate parenting strategies that are age appropriate and constructive for handling problem behaviors so that children will not be subjected to high levels of punitiveness that could seriously interfere with the development of a secure attachment, and ultimately, with social competence.

Constructive principles of behavior modification will almost certainly assume a higher priority at the time that children leave infancy and burst into toddlerhood with autonomy striving, conflicts between dependence and independence, the onset of intentional aggression, and the need to begin to consider others as well as the self become important child-rearing issues in the minds of parents. On the basis of its record for helping parents and other caregivers to understand the dynamics of child behavior in early childhood and beyond, social learning theory has no equal, in my view. It takes into account the embeddedness of behavior in complex interpersonal relations such as the mother-child dyad, and provides a powerful theoretical framework for understanding systematic behavior change. In the years ahead, one would hope that the attachment theorists and the social learning theorists would pool their insight regarding development to the enlightenment of all students of young children.

The Onset of Prosocial Behavior and Responsibility

I would like now to discuss a cluster of child behaviors that lie at the heart of socialization and that do, indeed, require the caregiver to take the best from attachment theory and social learning theory. As children emerge from infancy and toddlerhood, societal social values come into the picture. Children of preschool age are expected to begin to display non-egocentric behaviors such as empathy, sympathy, consideration for others, fairness, and social responsibility. Young children are not known for their altruistic concern for the other over the self. Piaget (1959) describes the child as egocentric -- unable to take the perspective of another and inclined to attribute his own perspective to others. In the view of Freud (1933), the young child fails to separate the self from the other and is motivated primarily by the "pleasure principle." Erickson (1968) discusses the child's narcissism and "sense of omnipotence."

How do parents, teachers, and other agents of socialization inspire their children to show other-oriented behaviors when, on the surface, these behaviors appear to be contrary to the child's self-serving, egocentric interests? How do adults build on the foundation of attachment and emotional dependence to establish for the child a "norm of responsibility?"

I want to comment on the research of three investigators whose work is well recognized in this area. In each case, the phenomenon under (prosocial behavior and social responsibility) can only be understood by recognizing patterns of child-rearing rather than individual child-rearing strategies. Also, in each case, the enlightened caregiver must take the perspective of the child in the tradition of Ainsworth's "sensitive mother," but also make effective use of the learning theorist's principles of behavior management.

I want to talk first about the work of Alfred Baldwin published during the last half of the 1940's (Baldwin, 1948). Baldwin and his colleagues studied the child-rearing practices of mothers of preschool children. On the basis of behavior ratings made by home visitors, they identified a child-rearing style of discipline called democratic in which the parent favors high levels of verbal exchange with the child, gives reasons for family rules, consults with the child about policy decisions, gives support for the child's initiative and curiosity, and establishes a low-key level of family emotionality surrounding discipline. (Democratic parenting was distinguished from a stricter, less open style of discipline called authoritarian and from a more permissive style called laissez-faire). Baldwin also had ratings on another parenting variable called control. Parents rated high on control believed in the firm establishment of limits and expectations. Restrictions, whether arrived at democratically or autocratically, were clearly conveyed to the child and there was a low level of friction in these homes over disciplinary decisions. The four-year-old children in this study were rated on an extensive battery of social and task-oriented behaviors based on observations in their homes and in a nursery school setting.

In assessing the effects of the democratic and control child-rearing dimensions independent of each other, it was found that parents who favored democratic practices had children who were high in activity level and who showed leadership and initiative in the nursery school, as one might expect. However, they also were high in aggressiveness, cruelty, and fearlessness. The control dimension had effects that appeared to be quite different. Parents high in the use of control had children who were low in quarrelsomeness, negativism, and disobedience, but they also were low in initiative and tenacity.

From these behavioral constellations, it appears that parents who emphasized democratic principles at the expense of control risked having children who were prone to pursue their own agendas without regard for the consequences to others. On the other hand, parents who favored control at the expense of democratic practices, had children who were attentive to the agendas of authority figures --t hey were quiet, well-behaved, and nonresistant -- but they also were restricted in curiosity and originality.

In combination, the democratic and control orientations appeared to strike a balance. Parents who were high in the use of democratic principles but who also maintained reasonably high levels of control over their children had children who were appropriately assertive without showing too little conformity to adult demands and expectations.

I want to comment now on the work of Martin Hoffman of New York University, who also has made significant contributions to the study of child-rearing practices as they relate specifically to non-egocentric

behavior and altruism (Hoffman, 1963). Hoffman conducted a study of "consideration for others" in a sample of middle-and-lower class preschool age children. The children were observed in a nursery school setting for indicators of general sociability as well as for consideration for others. The mothers of the children were interviewed about their child-rearing practices and were rated for the amount of nurturance they displayed toward their children. Hoffman also identified two contrasting disciplinary styles on which mothers were rated: rational/inductive discipline, which includes high use of reasons and explanations in support of demands (similar to Baldwin's democratic discipline), and a power-assertive style of discipline stressing high use of threats against the child and force without explanations. Finally, Hoffman assessed the degree to which mothers used what he called victim-oriented strategies in which the parent called the child's attention to the consequence of his or her misbehavior for the victim and expected the child to make restitution for misdeeds. Hoffman hypothesized that victim-oriented discipline would sensitize a child to harm done and to the feelings of others who have been wronged, leading to higher levels of consideration for others. He also felt that high power-assertion in child rearing would cause the child to be preoccupied with his or her own plight in the face of an angry, threatening parent, with little investment in the plight of the victim. As it turned out, Hoffman was right about power assertion (and others have found similar results). Threatening, punitive parents are not very likely to inspire in their children high levels of consideration for others. Again, a pattern of parenting strategies seem the most predictive of high levels of consideration by children. The optimal pattern for fostering consideration appeared to be high warmth and nurturance between mother and child, the use of rational/inductive discipline (featuring reasons and explanations for demands placed on the child) combined with victim-oriented approaches to misbehavior. High levels of maternal warmth by itself, without rational inductive discipline and attention to the plight of the victim, appeared to foster general sociability (friendly outgoingness in children) but not specifically consideration for others. Also, a victim-oriented approach alone, without rational/inductive discipline (with its reasons and explanations), did not predict consideration for others. Apparently, three factors in the rearing of these children made a difference -- nurturance between mother and child, the use of rational inductive discipline, and calling attention to the plight of one's victim.

Diana Baumrind of the University of California is the third investigator whose work I want to mention. Baumrind has conducted a number of studies on the relation between parent child interaction styles and social responsibility in young children, a construct that broadly samples the child's prosocial behavioral repertoire. Data on one sample of children studied by Baumrind (1971) were obtained from nursery school observations carried out over several months and in a test situation when the children were four to five years of age. The measure of social responsibility was a composite score for each child on three behavioral dimensions--friendly/hostile, cooperative/resistive, and achievement-oriented/nonachievement-oriented.

Data on the parents' child-rearing attitudes and behaviors were obtained during home observation and in separate interviews of mothers and fathers. (To preserve independence, the home measures were obtained by individuals other than those who were observing and rating the children in the nursery school and test situations.)

From her data, Baumrind identified a child-rearing orientation called authoritative in which parents preferred rational, issue-oriented discipline (similar to the rational/inductive discipline in Hoffman's study), encouraged verbal exchanges with their child and respected the child's needs and desires (similar to Baldwin's democratic parents) and, in addition, stressed the rights and responsibilities of parents to set behavioral standards for their children. The results of this study are not very persuasive for girls. In the case of boys, however, parents who used authoritative parenting strategies (in contrast to a more strict authoritarian style, or a more lenient permissive style of parenting) had sons who scored relatively high on social responsibility. As in the previous studies, it appears that parents who combine rational discipline (during which they show consideration for their child's point of view) with expectations that their child meet reasonably high standards of responsibility, appear to have socially mature sons.

The parents in these studies are, indeed, blending an agenda they have for their young children with the agenda the child has for himself. They treat their children respectfully and with consideration and expect consideration in return. They invite their children to have their say on issues that upset and frustrate the child, but they do not abrogate their responsibilities as adults vis-a-vis the child in their care. They expect reasonable conformity to demands and expectations, and accountability following misbehavior.

Competence in the Early Childhood Peer Group

We have considered mostly the ways in which adults influence the social competence of the young child -- particularly the ways they encourage social responsibility and prosocial behaviors such as helping, sharing and caring about others. How about the effects of peers on these behaviors? Are children in our early childhood programs inspired by their companions to display a developmental trajectory toward increased prosocial behavior throughout this age period? Although the evidence is somewhat mixed on this point -- peer relations in the early childhood years do not proceed as though they were made in heaven -- in general, the answer is yes. Children of four or five years of age, compared with two- or three-years-olds, are surprisingly sophisticated in their interactions with age mates.

What research do we have to support such a statement? First, there is evidence that preschool children in peer-group situations recognize social competence when they see it. Those children who are accorded high sociometric stats by their companions -- those most often watched, followed, selected as "best liked" or "friend" -- are indeed the more competent children in the group. High status children are generally friendlier than others and are more likely to be cooperative with peers and compliant with adults. They show what might be called "leadership ability:" they typically display average to high levels of dominance and assertiveness in peer interactions without being overly demanding or aggressive. Their preschool companions tend to reinforce their mature responses with accepting smiles, attention, affection, and imitative behaviors. At the same time, children in preschool groups are usually reflecting of companions who are egocentric or overly disruptive or aggressive, pressing these children to mend their ways of interacting with peers. (Very shy or withdrawn children tend to be ignored by their classmates rather than rejected.)

It is encouraging to note that friendly prosocial behaviors steadily increase in frequency throughout the preschool years, including such behaviors as helping others, sharing, affection giving, and generosity. In the case of help giving, for example, observations by Stith and Connor (1962) indicate that, while at all preschool ages, help seeking is more frequent than help giving, help giving gradually becomes more prominent in peer interactions. In their observations, the younger preschoolers sought help approximately six times as often as they gave help, while for the older children there were two instances of seeking for every one of giving. Furthermore, both help seeing and help giving in the older children tended to be addressed to peers rather than to adults, compared with younger children; thus, by four and five years of age, children are beginning to recognize the ability of their companions to be helpful to them when they are in need, as well as their own ability to be helpful to others.

This is not to say that life goes on the early childhood peer group without conflict. Indeed, observations from a number of studies suggest that the number of fights and arguments also increases steadily from age three to four or four and a half (at which point fights typically decrease). However, it should be noted that while conflict and aggression increases modestly, friendly interactions increase dramatically in most of the observed settings; hence, friendly behaviors are becoming more and more prominent over time relative to conflicts and fights.

The increase in conflicts among children is not too surprising given that older preschoolers play with a greater number of different children, for longer periods of time, and in larger groups than do younger preschoolers. Furthermore, the play of the older children typically is more complex, requiring frequent sharing, cooperating and compromising.

Even as conflicts increase in the peer group, evidence suggests that older preschoolers are becoming more civilized in their management of these encounters. Verbal aggression (as an alternative to physical aggression), compromise and negotiation become increasingly prominent as ways of settling conflicts. Also, more of the blatant aggression of the older children, compared with the younger ones, is retaliatory -- in response to clear violations of group protocol and justice -- rather than unprovoked. Clearly, children are being challenged by their companions to work out reasonably equitable solutions to conflicts.

As young children begin to develop ongoing friendships, the challenges are even more evident. Many of the conflicts preschoolers experience are, in fact, with their chosen friend rather than with acquaintances: hence, children are motivated to be considerate and thoughtful of special friends if they wish to establish and maintain such relationships. Willard Hartup and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota (Hartup,

Laursen, Stewart, & Eastanson, 1987) have recently completed a study of conflicts among four- and five-year-old chosen friends compared with those who are only acquaintances.

Clearly, friend pairs have conflicts as other dyads do! But what characterizes friends is that they manage conflicts better than do acquaintances. The conflicts of friends were more likely to be resolved by negotiation rather than by "standing firm." Friends more often found solutions that were equitable -- or at least partially so -- than did acquaintances, and friend's conflicts were somewhat less emotionally intense: friends at times defused their conflicts by temporarily leaving the scene or changing the subject. Finally, following the resolution of conflicts, friends were more likely to remain in proximity to each other and resume interactions than were acquaintances who have quarreled. Observations by Gottman (1983) suggest a similar pattern in that children who were just beginning to form friendships were observed to use gentler modes of conflict resolution (weaker demands, more compliance and negotiation rather than ultimatums) and to avoid extended chains of angry interaction compared with children who played together but who did not develop an ongoing friendship. Hartup makes the point that cooperation in early peer relations is both an antecedent of friendships (in that children are attracted to companions who can cooperate) and a consequence of friendship (inasmuch as children feel pressed to be cooperative in order to maintain a valued friendship).

It does appear to be the case that early childhood settings are effective training grounds for social competence -- particularly for those social behaviors that require perspective taking and consideration for others. Children learn from such settings how to make and maintain friendships and what behaviors are acceptable and unacceptable to their companions. To the surprise of many, preschool-age children--particularly by age four years -- are reasonably in "sync" with adults in that they approve and disapprove of many of the same social behaviors approved of and disapproved of by parents and teachers. Children of this age do, indeed, help to socialize each other. With the help of parents, caregivers and teachers who can skillfully guide children toward more mature management of their peer interactions, the early childhood years can provide a firm foundation for prosocial peer relations during the grade school years and beyond.

Summary Comments

I have hypothesized a developmental continuum in parenting that begins with the child's agenda as top priority during the early months of life; the child's needs and wants are accommodated as much as possible. In time, however, a blending of the child's agenda and the caregiver's agenda -- the child's perspective and the caregiver's perspective -- takes over as the child emerges from infancy and enters the early childhood peer group. An Ainsworth caregiver teaches -- sensitive, accepting, cooperative, and assessible -- will continue to be important in helping the child to advocate on his own behalf. A social learning perspective, with its orientation on producing desirable behavior change, will be important in helping the child to assume responsibility and to accept wiilingly the "constraints by consensus" that society places on the behavior of all of us.

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